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Called To Nurse

By Rosa A. Gonzalez

FOREWORD

EVER since her graduation, Miss Gonzalez has set a high standard for her profession. While Superintendent of Nurses of the Presbyterian Hospital at San Juan, she was conspicuous in her ambitions for the pupil nurses: a graduate course "in the States" in dietetics for this one, in obstetrics for that one, in X-ray for a third. She planned these courses for two reasons: in order that the graduates of the hospital might be better qualified to do nursing in Porto Rico, and also that they might be more valuable to the hospital should they desire to follow their profession there.

Equally ambitious is she for the nursing profession in Porto Rico. Miss Ordway, Superintendent of the Hospital, wrote of her while she was at the Hospital: "Miss Rosa Gonzalez, a graduate of our hospital and our efficient Superintendent of Nurses is at present President of the Island Association of Registered Nurses. If you do not know conditions in Porto Rico or Miss Gonzalez's high ideals for her profession you cannot understand what her position means to her profession. In the States a registered nurse is of necessity a graduate nurse. This is not so at all in Porto Rico. Political pull and a false statement of two years' training in a hospital allows any girl to try the examination for a registered nurses' license and the same methods can earn her a passing grade. Miss Gonzalez keeps the ethical nurses keyed up to a high standard and through the Association is working for legislation which will put nurses on the Board of Examiners and which will require the presenting of a diploma from a recognized school of nursing as a necessary credential for admission to the examination. This is a tremendous task but through Miss Gonzalez's belief and her efforts the result will some day be accomplished. Its accomplishment will be the greatest achievement up-to-date toward securing adequate care of the sick for Porto Rico."

Miss Gonzalez was also conspicuous in her love for the Hospital. When the nurses left for the States to take their courses, after all instructions had been given, she had a last message for them. It was this: "Remember that it doesn't make so much difference what you do individually, but it does make a difference to the hospital; its reputation is in your hands. Never for a moment forget that." And in every letter that she wrote she held the honor of the hospital up to them.

Miss Gonzalez was Superintendent of Nurses in the Hospital for five years. She is now with the Department of Health of Porto Rico.

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By ROSA A. GONZALEZ

AMONG the first children who registered in the private school opened by the Congregational Board at Lares in 1900 were my sister Manuela and I. From the beginning the school was a joy to us—the new studies, the unusual methods, the open Bible, the teacher's interest in us. Out of school too we were privileged to learn to know our teachers, and it was at an evening affair, which proved, as I recall it today, to be nothing else than a prayer meeting, to which the teacher had invited me, that my father, in response to my plea that he go with me, first showed an interest in the spiritual things being taught us in the school. On this occasion the hymns, "Beautiful Words" and "Holy Bible" were sung. My father enjoyed them I know, for I remember hearing him hum the tunes as he went about in the days that followed; the Scripture reading must have appealed to him also for shortly afterwards be bought a Bible and began studying it.

Indeed the impression made that evening was so strong that my father was soon actively interested in the church, became a member, later a deacon and decided to study for the ministry. One of the strong influences toward this was the friendship of the pastor, the Rev. Sebastian L. Hernandez, a Mexican who had married an American, and his family.

At that time we lived across the street from each other, and every afternoon the minister and the teachers gathered at our house for the three o'clock coffee or refreshments. On Saturdays both families usually went picnicking. Sundays were spent in religious services. Sunday afternoons we visited the sick at the hospital. That was my first close contact with the sick, and although on our way home along toward sunset I played with the other children in the meadows while my father and our pastor sat under the trees and discussed Bible topics, I cannot help feeling now that through those Sabbath visits, child that I was, I had a vision of the world's suffering and a real call to service; for as a little girl I had my heart set on studying medicine and had my father lived longer, I should probably have been a doctor instead

of a nurse. Providence decreed otherwise, and I do not regret the change.

My father was very serious in his intention to become a minister and had almost completed arrangements to sell his grocery store and property and move to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to study theology, when he was taken sick and had to give up his job at city hall, where he had been serving some time as auditor. Four days later he died of heart failure. Two days before his death, Mother had given birth to a child and was so desperately ill that she was not expected to live; the baby died, but after many months of suffering and a slow convalescence, Mother recovered.

Through the selfishness of an uncle, more than to his dishonesty, our business went wrong and we lost all the property left to us, except the house in which we lived. Therefore, a year after Father passed away, Mother had to dismiss the servants; the afternoon refreshments were omitted, butter and other delicacies were cut from our diet, and we did all the housework except washing the clothes.

In 1907, just a few years after my father's death, while I was a pupil in the public school, I read in the papers the need of nurses at the Presbyterian Hospital. As my uncle had discouraged me by saying that the career of medicine was not proper for a girl and that we could never afford it, I decided to take up nursing. I talked my plans over with my mother, and although three years was a long time, and our means were getting lower every day, she consented to my entering the training school. In the face of the opposition of proud relatives, for needless to say all the relatives on my father's side were much opposed to my plans, as at that time nursing was considered the lowest thing a woman could do, I sent in my application and was accepted even though I was quite under age to enter any training school. I was unable to get any help whatsoever from my relatives, but the Masons, my father having been a Master Mason, supplied the money for my trip to San Juan, and the teachers presented me with the half dozen aprons needed by probationers. By this time Lares had become a Presbyterian station, so the workers were in close touch with the hospital.

The hours of duty in the hospital were long, and the life hard and unattractive for a girl of sixteen, but I felt that I could not go back home, though I did pack my trunk twice to go, and face them, so I decided to stick to my job until I had reached the goal. I meant to do good work so that they would not have to be ashamed of me. I wished, too, to show them that the religion we had chosen was a constructive one.

Once graduated, I took the Board examinations of my own accord, for I understood that it would give me a standing before the Government, and I was doing private nursing when I was requested by my hospital to help out for a month. That month extended into six years! During that time the Woman's Board of Home Missions paid my expenses to New York and I took a graduate course in massage and dietetics at the Presbyterian Hospital of that city.

In the summer of 1916 I left the hospital, and together with Petra Maldonado, one of our graduates, and Pilar Cabrera, from the Mercy Hospital, Baltimore, founded the Association of Registered Nurses of Porto Rico. I had once more started to do private nursing when two or three institutional positions were offered me, and I decided to take the one at Arecibo. There I reorganized Dr. Susoni's clinic and was superintendent of it for a year. Then I moved to Ponce and reorganized the school of nursing in connection with St. Luke's Hospital where I stayed as instructor and assistant superintendent for two years.

In October, 1918, a series of earthquakes visited the Island. Mayaguez was one of the worst-damaged cities. There I went with two head nurses and three students as a unit of St. Luke's hospital, under the auspices of the Red Cross at Ponce. We did visiting nursing, lived in a tent without any floor, with water up to our heels, slept on army cots and had to take the suitcase in bed with us, for there was no other place to put it to keep the clothes from getting wet. Though usually we were unable to get any clean water even to drink, we all enjoyed the experience because, I imagine, it was like living in the trenches. An epidemic of influenza followed the earlier disaster. The Ponce Red Cross established a hospital to help care for such cases, and they put me in charge of it. Out of all the personnel that went with me, only one nurse and myself, besides the cook, a boy, and two

laundresses, escaped the infection, but God helped those of us left "to hold the fort" and when the hospital was turned again into a school, we could think gladly that out of seventy-seven patients treated, only four had died.

In 1919, I accepted the position of Superintendent of the "Sanatorio Insular" at Rio Piedras, a very large and modern institution for tubercular patients, run by the Department of Health. While there, I realized that my hospital was in need of my services, and came back as Acting Superintendent of Nurses. A few months following, I was appointed by the Board as Superintendent of Nurses.

Realizing as I do, that Christian influence cannot be disassociated from the profession of nursing, and that it is "up to" this hospital to furnish the honest, self-sacrificing leaders and pioneers that Porto Rico, as well as the Antilles, needs in nursing, my one ambition is to train girls that, like the apostles, they may go out and preach the gospel of service to humanity as taught by the Presbyterian Hospital of San Juan, Porto Rico.

I love my work and thank God that he has permitted me to be a nurse.

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